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**Mexico's drug gangs go on the offensive against authorities; Criminals increasingly target police officials and government figures, changing the dynamics of violence in a deadly new phase of the narcotics fight**

[*William Booth in morelia mexico*](javascript:void(0);). [**The Washington Post**](http://quickproxy3.chipublib.org:80/sHfEO1208/url=http:/proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=318&pmid=7653&TS=1274295552&clientId=11417&VInst=PROD&VName=PQD&VType=PQD). Washington, D.C.: [May 2, 2010](http://quickproxy3.chipublib.org:80/sHfEO1208/url=http:/proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=572&VType=PQD&VName=PQD&VInst=PROD&pmid=7653&pcid=51951281&SrchMode=3). pg. A.10

**Abstract (Summary)**

No longer content to fight police officers and soldiers when confronted with arrest, the drug organizations are increasingly targeting police commanders and public officials. The attack on Bautista, which occurred in the state of Michoacan less than a mile from the crowded fairgrounds, was both brazen and sophisticated, Mexican law enforcement officials say.

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| **Full Text**   (922  words) |

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As a public safety chief was riding home last weekend after an evening of political schmoozing at the state fair, a stolen tractor-trailer burst onto the highway -- and another high-profile ambush began with a blast of light.

They were lobbing grenades at her.

Over the next six minutes -- as the official, Minerva Bautista, screamed into a police radio, "They're killing me!" -- up to 40 heavily armed commandos unleashed more than 2,700 rounds at her three-vehicle convoy of armor-plated sport-utility vehicles. Some of the weapons were capable of penetrating a vehicle's engine block or knocking down a helicopter.

Mexico's crime syndicates appear to be escalating their attacks against the state, according to law enforcement officials. No longer content to fight police officers and soldiers when confronted with arrest, the drug organizations are increasingly targeting police commanders and public officials.

"In the last few weeks, the dynamics of the violence have changed," said Interior Minister Fernando Gomez-Mont, the country's top security official. "The criminals have decided to directly confront and attack the authorities."

More than 22,700 people have been killed in drug-related violence since President Felipe Calderon began his battle against the powerful drug cartels in December 2006, according to a confidential government report. Mexican officials stress that the overwhelming majority of the dead were gangsters killed over turf or for revenge. Yet Calderon recently revealed that more than 1,100 of those killed were soldiers, police officers and officials.

Violence against Mexican authorities has been sensational but relatively rare in the past three years. But according to news and police reports, Mexico has entered an especially deadly period, with scores of attacks against police officers and government officials across the country.

In Ciudad Juarez, which is across the border from El Paso and is considered the capital of drug violence, gunmen ambushed two police vehicles at a busy intersection last week, killing seven officers and a 17-year-old passerby. Six of the police officers killed were federal officers; their colleagues now live in a hotel protected by armed guards and a wall of sandbags. Twenty-nine police officers have been killed in Juarez this year.

A week ago, gunmen raided the customs office at an international bridge that links Camargo, Mexico, to Rio Grande, Tex., forcing officials to close the border crossing for several hours.

The same day, in La Union, in the state of Guerrero, assailants threw grenades at offices of the state ministerial police.

In the sleepy little farm town of Los Aldamas in Nuevo Leon state, the police chief was dragged from his home and killed alongside two deputies last month. Earlier, the police chief in a nearby town was decapitated.

The assistant police chief in Nogales, Sonora, and his bodyguard were killed in late March in a barrage of fire from AK-47s.

On March 30, dozens of gunmen mounted coordinated attacks across the states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, targeting two army garrisons and touching off firefights that left 18 of the attackers dead.

"I believe that the number of attacks has increased, and now they are more selective attacks, on command centers, and the most obvious reason is they are trying to intimidate those leaders who try to combat organized crime and also to frighten the rank and file so they don't act," said Jose Luis Pineyro, a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico who studies the military's fight against crime.

The attack on Bautista, which occurred in the state of Michoacan less than a mile from the crowded fairgrounds, was both brazen and sophisticated, Mexican law enforcement officials say.

"What we saw at the scene was a carefully planned trap," said Jesus Montejano Ramirez, the state attorney general. "The sheer number of people involved in the attack and the precision with which it was carried out are clear signs that we are dealing with organized crime."

One of the grenades landed on the floorboard of the SUV carrying Bautista, but it did not explode.

"For me, this is a miracle," said Bautista, 37, after she was released from hospital this week, barely able to walk because of shrapnel wounds.

"It's a mix of emotions," she said, "among them a feeling of powerlessness to prevent what is going on. But we have to do something to stop it."

Two of her bodyguards and two bystanders died in the ambush. Nine people were injured. One SUV in Bautista's convoy burned at the scene and, a week later, remnants of melted tires still charred the highway. Nearby, four withered flower wreaths rattled in the dry wind.

None of the bodyguards returned fire, nor did Bautista.

Gomez-Mont, the interior secretary, said a little-known group called La Resistencia, or the Resistance, carried out the ambush. The group is employed by La Familia, which controls vast swaths of Michoacan, smuggling drugs to the United States and operating clandestine methamphetamine factories in the forests.

Other possible scenarios have emerged in the news media in Michoacan. One theory holds that the attack was so sophisticated that it must have been the work of another cartel, the paramilitary-style Zetas. Another hypothesis is that the attack came about because criminals were unhappy that Bautista had fired the director of state police.

Shortly before the attack, Bautista had warned that Mexico would not win the fight against the drug cartels with bigger weapons or more police -- but with social and economic development. This week she was unsure whether she would continue as Michoacan's public safety secretary.